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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this literature review is to determine what is known about a) prevailing patterns of interaction between leaders and other adults in public schools and b) conditions under which specific patterns of behavior of leaders are connected with variations in the behavior of other people in the school. A second objective is to find out what patterns of behavior make a difference in the performance of others and under what circumstances such connections between leader behavior and the behavior of others occurs. The literature is reviewed in terms of a network of forces, or of independent conditioning and dependent variables, with student learning considered as the major output or dependent variable. A heuristic model of this network is diagrammed and discussed in the introduction. The literature review is organized into sections on the role of the leader, leader behaviors and characteristics which have impact on others, and conditions affecting leader behavior and its consequences. References are included. Related documents are ED 084 658, SO 006 685, 686 and 688. (Author/KSM)

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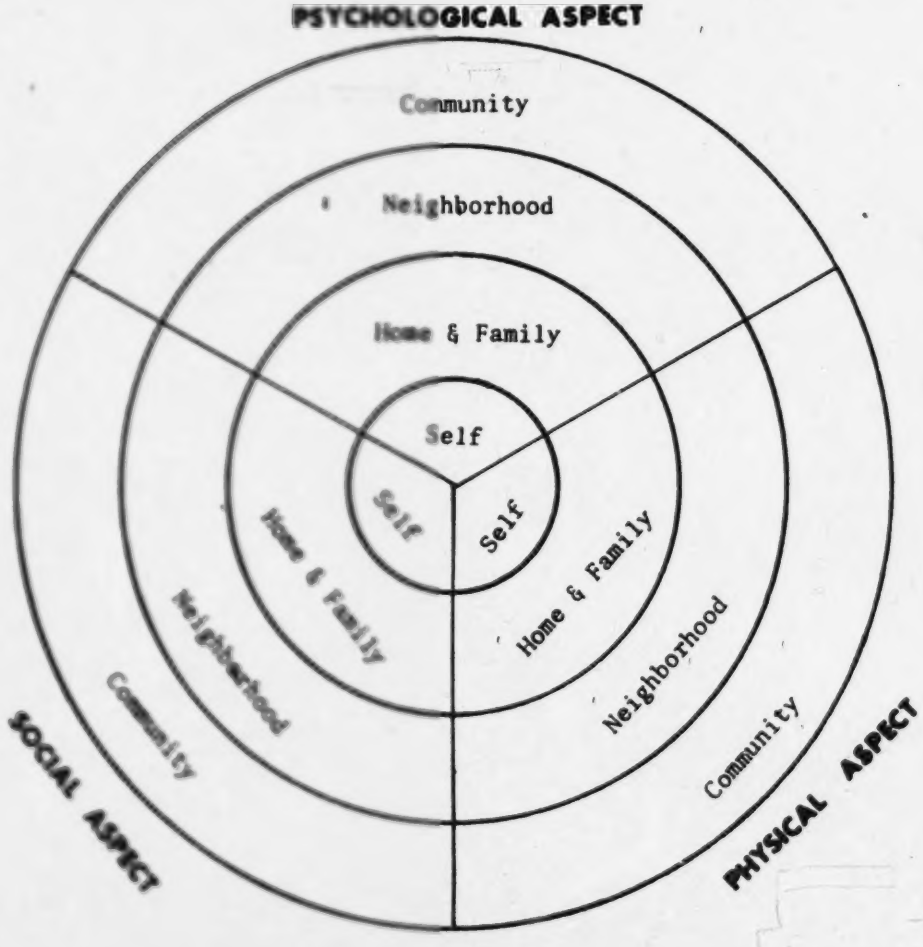
AN OCCASIONAL PAPER

INTERACTION PATTERNS OF LEADERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Paul C. Buchanan, Ph.D.



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Curriculum Research and Development Center in Mental Retardation
Department of Special Education
Ferkauf Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Yeshiva University
55 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10003

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INTERACTION PATTERNS OF LEADERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Paul C. Buchanan

Associate Professor of Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Curriculum Research and Development Center in Mental Retardation
Yeshiva University (New York)

The purpose of this study is to determine what is known a) about prevailing patterns of interaction between leaders and other adults in public schools, and b) about conditions under which specific patterns of behavior of leaders are connected with variations in the behavior of other people in the school.[1]

I began this study with the intention of focusing on supervision, not on leadership, since supervision is an issue much discussed in the literature of education; it is a title typically found in tables of school organization, and it is a subject for course-work in programs for educators. It turns out, however, that what is discussed as supervision differs from what is treated as leadership mainly in terms of the formal position held, with the supervisor holding a staff position (Harris, 1963: 111-112) and the leader either a staff or a line position. To study what people who hold a particular type of position do, while useful for some purposes, narrows the topic more than seems relevant in the present study. Thus the focus here is on leadership. And of the many ways in which it has been conceptualized (see Gibb, 1969, or Cartwright and Zander, 1968, for thorough and current reviews of leadership in all types of settings) the one most relevant to the objectives of the present study is that which views leadership as a process by which one person influences others in settings and/or attaining goals.

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[1] See Erickson (1963) for a similar view of needed research.

The second objective of the study is to find out what patterns of behavior make a difference in the performance of others and under what circumstances such connections between leader behavior and the behavior of others occur. To do this, an attempt is made to review the literature in terms of a network of forces; or of independent, conditioning, and dependent variables, with student learning considered as the major output or dependent variable. A general idea of such a network of forces is presented in Figure 1, where the arrows are intended to represent flow of influence.

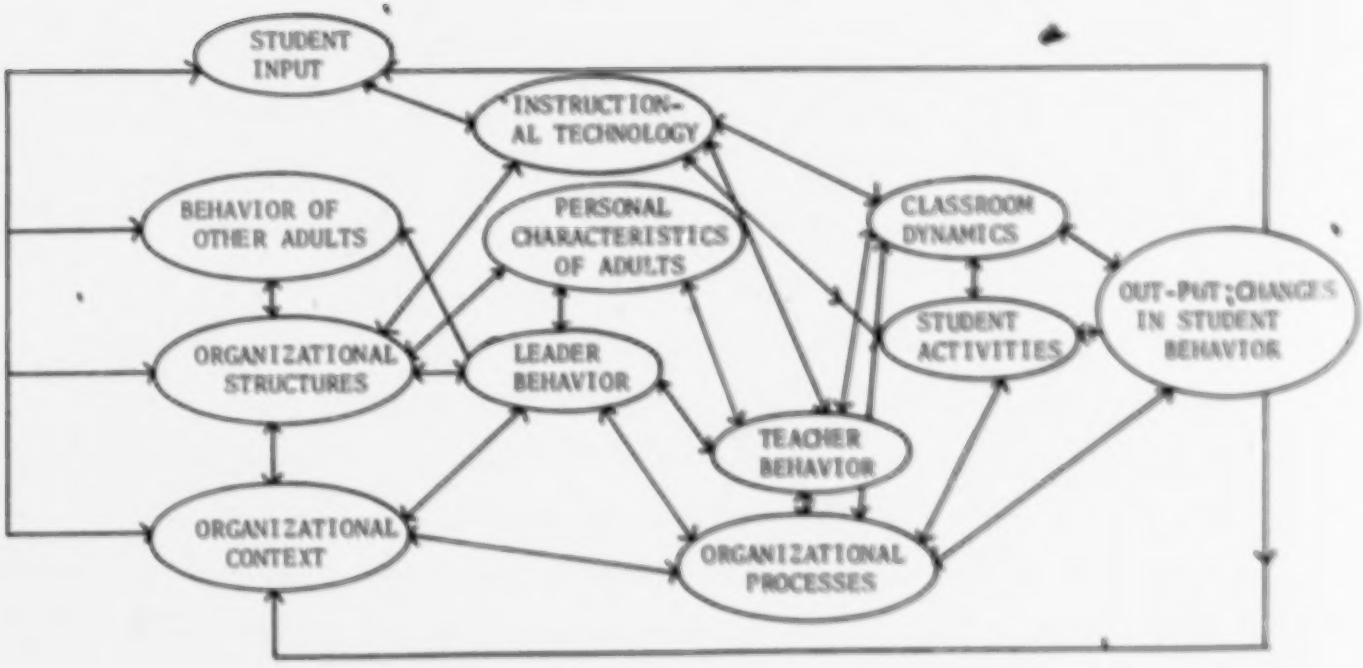

Figure 1. Heuristic Model

For each circle in the model, meaningful variables have to be identified in order to differentiate or categorize behaviors. Then the magnitude and direction of influence of changes in one variable upon others need to be assessed. Possible ways of going about this have been proposed recently (Barro, 1970; Dyer, 1970; Feldman, 1971). But as examination of the nature of available research indicates (Buchanan, mimeographed) there are serious shortcomings:

> Any attempt to derive conclusions from the literature regarding leadership in education is limited by the fact that(a) much of the literature consists of untested opinion;(b) most empirical studies are based on information from one school or one district (and are in effect single case studies) and thus are of very limited generalizability; (c) most studies utilize variables which are unique to the particular study and/or are non-theoretical, thus providing little in the way of a framework for integrating findings from different studies; (d) most do not specify the conditions under which a relationship between variables is tested, thereby running the risk that an actual relationship is undetected; (e) most use perceptions of involved persons rather than observations by a third party as sources of information regarding variables, thus making findings subject to the attitudes and in many cases to the memory of participants in the organization; (f) in many cases information regarding both variables is obtained from the same respondents, thus inflating the obtained measure of relationship due to a response set; and (g) the models used for differentiating among behavior patterns provide for limited alternatives and frequently involve one specified behavior with the only other option being the absence of the one specified, thus running the risk of not differentiating what are actually meaningfully different behaviors. (10-11).

With the goal as pictured in the model in Figure 1 and keeping in mind the limitations in empirical studies as just summarized, we turn now to see what is known about the behavior of leaders in public schools.

I. The Role of the Leader

In an essay on "power, people, and principals" Miller (1962) stated that:

> The typical elementary school is like a loose federation of so many little kingdoms. The real power lies with the individual classroom teacher. The principal is a sort of local United Nations secretary, trouble-shooting and coordinating for the sake of orderly control ... (16)

This characterization is consistent with the findings from several empirical studies. For example, in an observational case study, Iannaconne (in Griffith, et al., 1964) found that while he was the teachers' source of information regarding policy, the principal made little attempt to exert initiative, and when teachers tried to influence the operation of the school they by-passed the principal - they had a well-established, and apparently efficient, informal communication system to the superintendent's office and to a committee of the board. Croft (1967) found that teachers in one school system reported little contact between themselves and their principal, and that the contact which occurred was mainly regarding discipline and school policy. And Lortie, in an unpublished paper referred to by Erickson, (1965: 17), found that teachers were seldom inclined to look at principals for help regarding classroom problems; they turn instead to colleagues, university professors, and to a lesser extent to subject-matter specialists within the school. Sarason, et al. (1966), concluded that the principal does not usually serve as someone with whom the teacher "thinks out loud." But neither do teachers talk with each other on more superficial matters, according to the Sarason study. (See also Sieber, 1968, 129ff.)

Yet quite a different picture of the potential of the principal is presented by Janowitz (1969):

> The principal plays a crucial role in what variations do exist and in the higher levels of teaching performance that can be found...He enjoys considerable power and can institute a variety of changes, even if they are only temporary - that is, for the duration of his tenure ... If he operates successfully, it is because he is a vigorous entrepreneur and is able to mobilize additional resources both within the system and in the community at large. (27-28)

Janowitz provides no specific support for his generalizations except to say he has drawn on published and unpublished studies of experimental programs in urban education (p. vii). But since he is speaking of potential rather than prevailing practices there is no contradiction between his view and that given above. And perhaps a finding by Brown (1970) helps explain the discrepancy between what a principal might do and what he actually does: school administrators, when compared with a group of business administrators, had a significantly lower propensity for risk-taking, higher need for security, lower need for achievement, and lower initiative. (The two groups of leaders did not differ significantly in intelligence, decisiveness, or self-assurance.) Brown also found that the school administrators perceived risk taking as less rewarding in their settings than did the business administrators, and they saw the predominant style of decision-making in their settings as more autocratic and less open than did the business administrators.

Another finding concerns the principal's area of legitimate influence. For instance, Becker (1953) found that:

> Teachers have a well-developed conception of just how and toward what ends the principal's authority should be used...These expectations are especially clear with regard to the teacher's relationships with parents and pupils, where the principal is expected to...uphold the teacher's authority regardless of circumstances.

Although Becker's study was conducted almost 20 years ago, more recent research yields similar findings (Sarason, et al., 1966; Croft, 1967; Bridges, 1964; Hills, 1963).

Sarason, et al., (1966) found considerable tension and distance in the relations between subject-matter supervisors and teachers. In the schools they observed, supervisors seldom came to the schools and when they did they brought materials which they "handed down" to the teacher to use. Teachers felt supervisors were more interested in seeing that their subject-matter

was covered than they were in helping the teacher. And supervisors "frequently treat the...teacher with gross disregard for her professional competence and... for common courtesies" (194).

A number of studies indicate that school personnel view their relations with each other, both vertical and horizontal, in terms of a bureaucratic framework - influence is based primarily on authority; responsibilities are clearly and narrowly delineated; and relations are impersonal (Anderson, 1967; Becker, 1953; Blumberg, 1970; Corwin, 1965; Trask, 1964).

Recently, Blumberg (1970) examined tape recordings of 50 conferences held by supervisors after observing teachers' classroom performance. Subjects in the study were teachers or supervisors who were taking graduate courses at the time of the study and who were willing to have their conferences taped and studied, thus yielding a select group. Using an interaction observation scheme which he developed for such purposes, Blumberg found that supervisors engaged in telling four times more frequently than they did in asking; gave directions to the teacher seven times more frequently than they asked the teacher to explore alternatives; rarely made statements which would help build a healthy climate between themselves and the teachers; used "unextended" comments like "Good," or "I like that" rather than less evaluative comments like "That's an interesting point," or "Others on the staff would undoubtedly be intrigued with that approach"; devoted little effort to building on and using the teacher's ideas; and rarely discussed learning problems. When they did talk about learning problems, they discussed them in phrases such as "poor home conditions," "poor discipline," etc.; they didn't explore the problem in depth or define it with sufficient precision to provide a basis for action.

Surprisingly, the information presented above is all that I have located which even approximates meaningful empirical study of leader behavior in

public schools. Recognizing the fact that most of these studies deal with single schools or single districts, what picture does it suggest? The most objective study is that by Blumberg, although it is limited by being based on an atypical sample and by the fact that it examined interaction around one focus - i.e., discussion of classroom performance. The information from all of the studies can rather accurately be drawn together in the following picture of relations as described by Blumberg and Cusick (1970):

1. Legitimate teacher complaints or grips tended not to be dealt with directly by the supervisor. More often than not the teacher's feelings were handled by agreeing with him that the complaint was indeed legitimate, period.

2. In no case, when a supervisor gave some advice or admonition to a teacher did a teacher ask "why?"

3. The huge bulk of discussion revolves around maintenance procedures: schedules, correcting papers, lining up youngsters, being in the classroom when the pupils arrive, etc.

4. When teachers become defensive, the supervisor backed off from dealing with the defensiveness.

5. The use of key words or phrases such as "discipline," "homework," "good response," "behavioral problem," .... seemed to serve in place of discussion ... untested common assumptions about the meaning of these words enabled the participants to come to closure without exploring the basis of the assumption ...

6. Supervisors seem to ask pat questions; teachers respond with pat answers.

7. One rarely gets the feeling of either supervisors or teachers as people. They appear to be role-playing.

II. Leader behaviors and characteristics which have impact on others.

Apparently it is important for leaders in school settings to behave in ways which meet the expectations of others and thus to be predictable. (But whether this is more so than in other settings the research does not show.)

Significantly, high relations have been found between, on the one hand, the extent to which the leader's behavior meets the others' expectations, and on the other, (a) the job satisfaction of the others (Moyer, 1955; Guba and Bidwell, 1957; Bidwell, 1965), (b) their evaluation of the leader (Guba and Bidwell, 1957), and (c) the other's effectiveness on the job (Guba and Bidwell, 1957). These findings are consistent with the findings described in the previous section to the effect that relations tend to be bureaucratic, since bureaucratic relations tend to be predictable, a point argued by Moeller (1964).

Apparently, teachers respond to feedback regarding their job performance. However, in one study (Tuckman and Oliver, 1968) when feedback was provided to teachers by their students or peers, they changed in the direction desired by the other person, but when the feedback was from their superiors they changed away from the direction desired by the other person. While these findings were statistically significant, the study was conducted in only one school system, leaving open the question of their generalizability. But the fact that teachers in even one system reacted so explicitly to the source of feedback suggests that the findings of Blumberg and Cusick regarding what goes on in the relation of teachers and their leaders may be general.

When principals are seen by their teachers as having high influence upon the operation of their school, teachers evaluate the school positively (as trustful, creative, genuine, etc.), they are satisfied with the way the principal does his job, and they feel that they too have influence both on the principal and on the way the school is run. These findings, from Hornstein, et al., (1968) are consistent with findings from industrial and other settings (Likert, 1961).

The basis of the principal's influence also appears to be important; in the study by Hornstein, et al., it was found that principals seen as basing their

influence on expertness had high influence on the school's functions and on the teachers' behavior while those seen as using either coercive or legitimate influence were seen as having little influence. (All of these correlations were significant at .01 level.) The only surprising thing here is regarding legitimate influence. From the information in the previous section one would expect that exertion of legitimate influence by the principal would be accompanied by a feeling of being influential on the part of the teachers. But maybe not; for the principal to fulfill expectations and thereby be "legitimate" was associated with the teachers' being satisfied with the job and with the principal, but perhaps teachers don't need to be influential themselves in order to be satisfied.

The behavior "style" of the leader, variously characterized in terms of the way he involves teachers in decision-making, the extent to which he is direct and indirect in his interactions with teachers, and the emphasis he places on "professional leadership," etc., has been found associated with the extent to which subordinates view him positively (Bidwell, 1965; Bridges, 1964); with the quality of their relations with him (Blumberg, 1968); with teachers' productivity as rated by the teachers themselves (Blumberg and Amidon, 1965; Gross and Herriott, 1965); with pupil achievement (Gross and Herriott, 1965; Feldvebel, 1964); with school climate (Watkins, 1969); and with teacher morale (Blumberg and Weber, undated; Gross and Herriott, 1965).

The extent to which the principal "carries out disposal functions," such as "protects the teacher from outside influences," is related with teacher morale and with their confidence in the principal (Mills, 1965).

The more the principal is viewed by teachers as providing them support (Hilfiker, 1969) and as supporting innovative teaching practices (Chesler, et al., 1963) the more the teachers are innovative in their teaching practices.

In an unpublished masters thesis (reported by MacKay 1969),

> Ziolowski attempted to determine which supervisory practices differentiated between high schools classified as being superior or inferior. He found that the use of staff meetings which focused on classroom teaching problems and hard-working, considerate behavior by principals were emphasized more in the superior schools.

Herriott and St. John (1966) found, in a study of elementary schools in 40 large cities, that in schools in relatively low socio-economic communities the way the principal did each of the following correlated significantly with his over-all effectiveness as rated by the teachers: general planning for the school; keeping the school office running smoothly; resolving student discipline problems; getting teachers to use new educational methods; improving the performance of inexperienced teachers; getting teachers to coordinate their activities; attracting able people to the staff; running meetings and conferences; handling parental complaints; and giving leadership to the instructional program. This is one of the better-designed studies reviewed in this section. It is based on information from elementary school principals in 40 large cities, and while the information regarding the two variables is perceptual, information on one variable was obtained from one-half of the teacher respondents from each of the 79 schools and information on the other was obtained from the other half, thus avoiding inflated correlations due to a common data source. However, findings pertain more to the functions of a principal than to method of functioning: they say what kinds of things he does which makes a difference, but they provide no information regarding how he does them (i.e., how he gets teachers to use new methods).

In a study which is systematic yet has obvious weaknesses, Doll (1969) throws some interesting light on the question of what is done by more as compared with less effective principals in inner city elementary schools. On the basis of his own observations and his interviews with 5 teachers from each

of an unspecified number of schools Doll identified one set of schools which were "better" and another set which were "worse" than the others in the same setting (page 11-12). Then he set about examining his observation and interview data for differences between the two sets of schools.

> In general, the investigator found three possible reasons for the school's deviation from other schools in its cluster. These reasons seemed to be: (1) The sources from which the principal took his cues for his administrative behavior (cues from the administrative hierarchy vs. cues from the faculty and community); (2) the grading structure of the school (K-6 vs. K-8); and (3) the system of grouping pupils for instruction (departmental vs. self-contained classrooms). (12)
>
> The "successful" principals appeared to be those who (1) showed a willingness to move independently and decisively in matters affecting the faculty or school; (2) had a genuine empathy for the teaching staff and the residents of the neighborhood as well as an ability to show this empathy in a non-condescending manner; and (3) had a perception of the principal's role as one whose primary task is to assist the teachers to teach, even if it meant clashing with the wishes of the administrative hierarchy. (13)

It is surprising how few empirical studies I was able to find regarding the behaviors or characteristics of leaders which make a difference in the behavior of other adults in the school setting. Also significant is the nature of the variables in terms of which leader impact was assessed: most of the dependent ones either are assessed in terms of someone's impressions and thus are based on very "soft" data, or they have questionable importance in the effective operation of a school, i.e., the significance of the variable is untested and is presented with little rationale.

On the other hand, recently there has appeared a report on the work of a principal by a journalist (Bumstead, 1968) and several explanations by principals regarding the above-average achievement scores attained by their students (Fliegel, 1971; Lonoff, 1971; Wayson, 1971). However, in each case evidence supporting the assertion that the school in question is above average in performance is open to question, and the statements regarding factors which

accounted for quality output are both ambiguously stated and only impressionistic. As in the proverbial old men's explanations for their longevity, explanations which one principal gives for his success are incompatible with those given by another, and the explanations by both reflect their values.

III. Conditions affecting leader behavior and its consequences.

I have found only three empirical studies which have attempted to specify conditions under which a given behavior pattern or characteristic or a leader has differential impact upon some aspect of the educational process. One is Herriott's and St. John's study mentioned above; they found sizeable and significant correlations between some behaviors of the principal and his effectiveness in schools in lower socio-economic status (as judged by the principal) but not in those of higher status. Watkins (1969) found sizeable and statistically significant correlations between social distance of the principal from his staff. He found that the greater the distance using Fiedler's instrument, then the less open the Climate, the lower the Esprit, and the lower the Thrust (on Halpin and Croft's OCDQ) in all-black schools in the South, while in the all-white schools the correlations were non-significant. And in the study mentioned above by Tuchman and Oliver the effect of receiving feedback regarding their performance was different when it represented the wishes of students and other teachers than it was when it represented the wishes of principals.

Litwak and Meyer (1965) have developed an interesting model from which hypotheses can be derived regarding the conditions under which correlations would be expected among the behavioral style of the leader, the nature of the community, the procedures for linking the school with the community, and the effectiveness of school-community relations.

I can think of no better summary of the information presented in this paper than to say that studies based on a model such as that of Litwak and Meyer are currently completely lacking, yet are most needed in order to enlarge our knowledge of leadership in education.

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